

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE CONSECRATION OF THE

NEW CHURCH

AT

HACKNEY.

ON SATURDAY, JULY 15, 1797.

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ON SATURDAY, JULY 15, 1797.

BEFORE THE RIGHT REV. BEILBY, LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

By J. SYMONS, *R*
RECTOR OF WHITBURN, DURHAM.

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I COR. iii. 17.

If any man defile the Temple of God him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is Holy.

THAT it has been the practice of all ages to set apart places for divine worship, that such places have ever been regarded with peculiar reverence, and to secure to them that reverence have been separated from all common and profane uses and dedicated to God's service by some solemn act of consecration, are points that need little proof.

The Patriarchs, wherever they erected an altar in the place in which God had appeared unto them, consecrated it to the Lord. The Jews consecrated, and that by the command of God, their Tabernacle, their Temple, their vestments and vessels belonging to his service *. When Solomon had finished his Temple, he dedicated it with great solemnity, assembling “ the elders of Israel and all the heads of

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“ the

* Exod. xl. 9, 10. Levit. viii. 10, 11.

“ the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel *,” to be present on the occasion ; to implore, as we this day do, God’s blessing on the place and services to be celebrated therein. And the places so consecrated were ever after held so sacred that it was highly offensive to the feelings of piety to profane them. Every external purification that tended to impress them with reverence to the presence of God and the place of his worship was required of the worshipper, as not only in itself becoming, but as emblematical of that purity of heart without which they were unfit for intercourse with God. And every defilement of his Holy Temple was severely punished, in some cases by their own laws, in the more glaring instances of transgression, and in such as were not always obvious to human notice, by some heavy judgment upon them from the immediate hand of God, to whom they looked in all such cases as the sure avenger of his violated sanctuary †.

Even Heathens, taught by their own pious feelings, consecrated their Temples, and were careful to avoid whatever they considered as a profanation of them ‡. And so sacred did they hold the buildings that had been consecrated to their Gods, that though these were destroyed still they considered the spot on which they stood as holy ground ||.

But

* 1 Kings viii.

† *Lightfoot’s Temple Service.*

‡ *Esse decet castum sancti qui limina templi
Ingreditur—In aditu templi in Epidauris, Clem. Alexandr.*

|| *Licet collapsa sit (sedes,) religio ejus occupavit solum. Plin. l. x. Ep. 76.*

But whatever notions might be attached to such places, and with whatever veneration they might be regarded in the darker ages of superstition, with the simplicity of christian worship it will be said such notions are not consistent, and in the present enlightened state of mankind all such superstitious customs must give way to more rational ideas of the Deity and the services that we owe him. It is in the heart that true religion is seated. It is there that the Christian is to erect his Temple, and thither that he must bring the spiritual sacrifices that are required of him: and the very passage I have chosen for the present occasion will be brought in proof of this. "If any man defile the Temple of God him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy; which Temple ye are," for so it follows in the verse from which the text is taken.

Far is it from the design of this discourse to defend the superstitions of any church or age, or to contend for any ceremonial service, however free from superstition or conducive to the decency of divine worship, at the expence of that spiritual worship to which external forms must always be subservient. While I contend for the holiness of the place of God's worship and the reverence that is due to that, I shall not be unmindful to guard you against any reliance upon the Temple or the service to the exclusion or neglect of that personal holiness without which the most splendid structures, the fittest ceremonies and the finest forms can be of little value in the sight of God. The heart itself must be pure as well as the place, alike free from the pollutions that would defile it and render it an unfit habitation for the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us. "Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God and that
" the

“ the Spirit of God dwelleth in you. If any man defile the Temple of God him shall God destroy; for the Temple of God is holy; which Temple ye are.” But while the allowed sense of the Text was this, it recognizes in its allusion to the Temple of divine worship the reverence that is due to that. From the acknowledged holiness of the Temple and the reverence that was paid to that it is that the apostle infers the purity that is required in the heart of man, who is figuratively the Temple of God, and who should be alike careful to keep that free from the pollutions that would defile it. So that this passage instead of lessening our reverence to places of divine worship confirms the veneration in which we hold them: and there is nothing in the nature of the Christian dispensation or the practice of the Christian church that should lead us to hold them in less estimation. On the contrary it will appear to have been the constant practice of the Church of Christ to consecrate them with great solemnity, and to hold them in all the veneration that we do.

Our Saviour himself would not suffer the Temple to be profaned * though that Temple was so soon to be destroyed, and though on other occasions he speaks in such terms of the ceremonial services of religion as have led many to despise or to reject them altogether as of no account under the Christian dispensation.

So vain of their Temple and service were the Jews, and so prone to rest upon the ceremonials to the neglect of the spiritual ends and purposes of their institution, that it was necessary to recal their attention to these, and to speak of them in terms not exclusive but strongly

* Matth. xxi. 12, 13.

strongly expressive of their superiority in rank and importance to the services of the Temple.

That Temple which was the subject of their pride was to be destroyed; and the time was at hand they were told in which it should no longer be a question whether Jerusalem or Samaria were the fitter place for their devotions: that with respect to time and place and mode of worship, these were circumstances of secondary importance: the devotion of the heart was of the first concern*.

But because some changes were to take place in the institutions of religion, and others were not to be accounted of so highly as they had been, it was not to be understood that they were not to be continued in as far as they would be necessary under other forms, or transferred to other times and places; though the Jewish sabbath was to be abolished that there would be no day left for the moral uses of its institution; though the Temple at Jerusalem would be destroyed that there would be no place for the worship of God among Christians; though no service could be acceptable to God that did not proceed from the heart, that there was no longer to be any external worship, or any form or order in the celebration of it.

When the services of the Temple were abolished, the ends of their institution having been now accomplished, "Christ being
C
" come an High Priest of good things to come by a greater and
" more

* John iv 21.

“ more perfect Tabernacle not made with hands *,” other places were substituted for the purpose of assembling to “ offer up spiritual “ sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ †.”

Assemblies of this sort there were among Christians from the first, though for a time scarcely to be called public ; for till their circumstances would allow them to have churches to resort to for the public exercise of their devotions, they were confined through fear of the Jews at first, and afterwards through fear of their heathen persecutors §, to the retirement of the closet, or the society of a few fellow converts in the house of some hospitable Christian whose zeal and circumstances would allow him to afford an asylum to his brethren.

The churches at Corinth, at Ephesus, at Rome and other places where the christian faith had found reception, were of this description. They were societies or congregations of Christians who met together.

• Heb. ix. 21.

† 1 Pet. ii. 5,

§ Separatim nemo habebat deos novos : sed ne advenas nisi publice adsecutos, privatim colunto. *Cic. de leg.* l. ii. 8. And the subsequent laws of the Roman empire were not more favourable to the public exercise of Christian worship, as the successive persecutions of the church, and the edicts expressly forbidding them to assemble for this purpose fully shew.

together in private *, in the night †, in one another's houses ‡, in such places as they could assemble in with safety unmolested by their enemies. Whatever temporary intermission of their fears, whatever local indulgences they experienced, it was not till the time of Constantine that they enjoyed the full liberty of professing their faith, and exercising their worship in places publicly allowed and set apart for such uses; and therefore it is not till then that we must look for the consecration of Christian churches.

The liberties and immunities which under some preceding Emperors they enjoyed § were too precarious and interrupted to allow much progress to be made in the erection of churches: and that which the indulgence of one Emperor might have encouraged them to undertake was soon put a stop to and overthrown by the rigorous severity of another ||. It was the subject of contemptuous reproach from their heathen adversaries that they had no temple, no altars, none of the splendid images and ornaments of the heathen

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tem-

* Nam qui Christiani eo tempore videbantur occulte & per latebras divinum officium celebrare.
Greg. Turon. apud Euseb. Eccles. Hist. c. x.

† Nihil aliud se (Plinium) de sacris eorum comperisse quam cætus antelucanos ad canendum Christo et Deo et ad confederandam disciplinam, *Tertul. Apol.* — *Plin. l. x. ep. 97.* — Quis nocturnis conventionibus si ita oportuerit a latere suo eximi libenter feret? *Tertul. ad uxorem, l. 2.*

‡ Acts xxviii. 30. Rom. xvi. 5. 23. Philem. ii. 2, &c.

§ Euseb. l. vii. c. 13.

|| Euseb. l. viii. c. 2.

temples*. And their own arguments in answer to these reflections are an acknowledgement of the fact †.

While persecution was their lot they patiently yielded in this as in every thing else to the will of providence which had so ordained it; but no sooner had the Emperor granted them permission to build churches ‡ and enjoy unmolested the privilege of frequenting them, than with uncommon joy and expedition they set about the pious work||; not less happy to have that liberty restored than were the Jews in the reign of Cyrus to have the liberty of rebuilding theirs. Churches were immediately erected in the chief cities; and from that time wherever the Christian faith hath extended the example hath been

* In hac consuetis parte crimen nobis maximum impietatis affigere, quod neque aedes sacras venerationis ad officia construamus, non Deorum alicujus simulachrum constituamus, non altaria fabricemus, non aras &c. *Arnob. l. vi.*

Cur nullas aras habent, templa nulla, nulla nota simulachra. *Cecil. contra Minut Felic.*

† Putatis autem nos occultare quod colimus si delubra & aras non habemus. *ibid.*

Plus nostra misericordia infumit vicatimquam vestra religio templatim. *Tertul. pol.*

Templa extruimus nulla, nec eorum effigies adoramus, &c.—nunquid enim delubris aut templorum eum constructionibus honoramus. *Arnob. l. vi.—Origen contra Celsum, l. viii.*

Tum tibi auro distincta laquearia & pretiosi marmoris crustis vestita domicilia sordebunt cum scieris te excolendum magis, te potius ornandum, domum tibi hanc esse potiore quam Dominus insedit Templi vice, in qua spiritus sanctus coepit habitare. Pingamus hanc domum pigmentis innocentiae, illuminemus luce justitiae. *Cyprian.*

‡ Euseb. l. x. c. 25¹

|| Και τις ινδως ανωγει ιωντες χαλα, &c. *Euseb. l. x. c. 2.*

been followed*; and in the building and decoration † of these no expence hath been spared that could mark the pious desire of the faithful to erect for the earthly habitation of the Deity edifices suited to the honour of his name: Witness those venerable structures which remain in our own country, alike gratifying to the antiquary as specimens of the architecture of the times, and to the pious Christian as proofs of their early devotion and zeal. It can at no time have been said of the Christian world that they have “dwelled in ceiled houses and let the church of God lie waste ‡.”

D

Coæval

* Excitabat Theodorus archiepisc. (Cantuar.) fidelium devotionem et voluntatem in quarumlibet provinciarum civitatibus, nec non villis, ecclesias fabricandi, paroecias distinguendi, assensus regios procurando ut si qui sufficientes essent & ad Dei honorem pro voto haberent super proprium fundum ecclesias construere, earundem perpetuo patronatu gauderent, *M.S. Cod. Cantuar. Aula Trinit. Not. apud Bed. Hist. l. v. c. 8.*

† Paintings were very early introduced into Christian churches. “Certissimam fidem facit (Augustinus) in parietibus passim depingi consuevisse Christum hinc inde Petrum & Paulum laterales habentem, atque etiam Abrahamum filium suum immolantem. Sed et martyrum fortissimos agones in ecclesiis etiam effigiari solitos testantur Basilii, Gregorius Nyssenus & alii complures qui omnes eodem quo Constantinus vixere sæculo.” *Baron. an. 57.*

‡ Correspondent with the state of our country was the simplicity of the first churches in Britain. Wood and thatch were the materials of which they were constructed. These were succeeded by the more durable materials of stone and lead. At length the refinements of taste were introduced, and artists were sought from among the more polished nations to add ornament to utility, and decorate with suitable embellishments though still with simplicity the houses of God. A few extracts from the venerable Bede, in proof of the early state of our architecture, may not be unacceptable to the lovers of antiquity.

Rex Edwinus (an. 637) baptizatus est Eboraci die sancto paschæ in ecclesia S. Petri apostoli quam ibidem ipse *de ligno* construxit—mox majorem ipso in loco & augustiorem *de lapide* fabricare basilicam

Coæval with the liberty to erect them is the practice of consecration * ; nor have Christians at any time entered upon the sacred offices

licum in cuius medio ipsum quod prius fecerat oratorium intruderetur. *Beide Hist. l. ii. c. 14.*

In qua videlicet civitate (Lindocollina) et ecclesiam operis egregii *de lapide* fecit. c. 16. Ad
CANDIDAM CASAM eo quod ibi ecclesiam *de lapide insolito Britonibus more* fecerit. l. iii. c. 4.

Aidano episc. de hac vita sublato, Finan pro illo gradum episcopatus a Scotis ordinatus ac missus acceperat; qui in insula *Lindisfarnensi* fecit ecclesiam episcopali sede congruam. Quam tamen, more Scottorum, non de lapide sed de robore facta totam componit atque arundine texit. Quam tamen, tempore sequente, Reverendiss. Archiepis. Theodorus in honorem beati Petri apost. dedicavit. Sed et Episcopus loci ipse Eadberht ablata arundine *plumbi laminis* eam totam, hoc est tectum & ipsos quoque parietes ejus cooperire curavit. *Bed. l. iii. c. 25.—Hen. Huntingdon l. iii.*

Suscepit vero pro Wilfrido episcopatum Hagastaldensis ecclesiæ Acca presbyter ejus—qui et ip-
sius ecclesiæ suæ quæ in beati Andreæ apost. honorem consecrata est, ædificium *multifario decore
ac mirificis ampliavit aperibus*—vasa sancta & luminaria aliæque hujusmodi quæ ad ornatum do-
mus Dei pertinent studiosissime paravit. *Bed. l. v. c. 11.*

Misit (Rex Piſtorum) legatarios ad virum venerabilem Cealfridum, abbatem monasterii beatorum apostolorum Petri & Pauli quod est ad ostium *Wiri* amnis, & juxta amnem *Tina*, in loco qui vocatur *Ingyrtum*,—et architectos sibi mitti petiit, qui *juxta morem Romanorum* ecclesiam *de lapide ingenti* ipsius facerent, promittens hanc in honorem beati apostolorum principis dedicandam. l. v. c. 22.

Brudius oceano transmissis, Gallias petens, cæmentarios qui *lapideam* sibi ecclesiam juxta Romano-
rum quem semper amabat morem facerent, postulat, accepit, attulit. Et tantum in operando studium,
piæ amore Beati Petri in cujus honorem faciebat, exhibuit, ut inter unius anni circulum ex quo fun-
damenta sunt jacta, culminibus superpositis, missarum inibi solennia celebrari videres. Proximante
ad perfectum opere misit legatarios Galliam qui *vitri faciores*, artifices videlicet Britanniæ eatenus in-
cognitis, ad cancellandas ecclesiæ, porticumque & cænaculorum ejus fenestras adducerent, *Bed. Hist.*
Abbat. Wiremuth & Girwians.

Defunctus autem Rex beatissimus (*Edwardus* an. 1066) in crastino sepultus est *Londini* in ecclesia quam ipse *novæ compositionis genere* construxerat, a qua post multi ecclesias construentes exemplum adepti opus illud expensis æmulabantur sumptuosius. *Matt. Paris.*

* Ἐὰν δὲ τούτοις τοῖς πρὸς τοὺς ἁγίους ἡμεῖς καὶ ἐνδοξάμενοι ὑποστηρίξωμεν, ἀφ' ἡμῶν ἐξέλθῃ καὶ ἡ πόλις, καὶ τῶν ἁγίων βοσκῶν ἐκδοκίμων ἀφ' ἡμῶν ἐκείνην ἵστασθαι, ὅτι ἐπὶ τούτῳ συνελθόντες, τῶν πνευμάτων ἐξ ἀποδοχῆς συνδράμωμεν. *Euzeb. l. x. c. 3.*

ices to be celebrated in them without first dedicating them to God's service by some solemnity of this kind, separating them from all common and profane uses, to be kept holy to the Lord †. So

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solemn

† The ceremony of this solemnity on the dedication of the first Christian church at Jerusalem consisted of appropriate prayers and praises, and, among other services like correspondent with the occasion, the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's supper, which still forms a part of this solemn office in our church. *Euseb. de vita Constantini.*

The accounts which our own early historians give us of the consecration of some of our cathedral and larger churches shew that it was a service celebrated with great solemnity, and attended in many cases, not only by the Bishop by whom the service was to be performed, but by other Bishops, Nobles and royal Personages,

That of *LINDISFARN*, note p. 10.—*CANTERBURY* a. 1114, *M. Par.*—*St. ALBAN'S* a. 1116. Rex Henricus cum regina sua, ad natale domini, die sc. Innocentium, interfuit dedicationi ecclesie S. Albani quam dedicavit Archiep. Rothom. Ganfridus. Sed cum præ magnitudine ecclesie fatigaretur, subiit onus Robertus Lincolnienſis sub abbate ejusdem loci Richardo viro venerabili requisitus—Interfuerunt autem huic dedicationi cum rege & regina ejus Matilda Rothomag. Archiepiscop. Ganfridus, London. Ep. Richardus, Sarisb. Roger, Dunelmens. Ranulphus cum comitibus Angliæ et Normanie multis, Richardo abbate ipsi Regi & aliis omnibus necessaria largiter procurante. *M. Par.*—*CIRENCESTER* a. 1177, a Bartholomæo Exon. episcopo, presente domino rege patre Angliæ qui eidem ecclesie in dedicatione sua magnos redditus dedit, *Roger de Howeden, annal.*

The neglect of this solemn rite in many churches gave occasion to a Constitution in the following century, requiring all churches whether cathedral, collegiate or parochial, to be consecrated within two years, (afterwards one) from their completion. *Concil. Othob. & Othobon. Giffon Cod.* About this time (an. 1138) were consecrated the churches of *WELLS, ABINGDON, EVESHAM, GLOUCESTER, TAWKESBURY, WINCHCOMB, PERSHORE, ALCESTER* and many others, *Matt. Paris.* Tempore quoque sub eodem dedicata est nobilis ecclesia structuræ aspectabilis *NOVI TEMPLI Londinensis*

solemn and memorable was this feast of dedication *, that its anniversary is even to this day observed in many parts of this kingdom, the festive part of its institution being still kept up though its religious purposes have long since ceased to be remembered †.

Nothing then in the argument of the apostle, in the nature of the Christian dispensation, or the practice of the Christian church, appears to

nenfis, presente Rege & multis regni magnatibus, qui eodem die (sc. ascensionis) completis dedicationis solemnibus, convivium in mensa nimis lauta celebrarunt, sumptibus Hospitaliorum. *ib.*—**SANCTI PAULI** Londini ab episcopo ejusdem loci, presente rege & multis episcopis & magnatibus, qui omnes ea die convivium cum ipso episcopo & canonicis lætanter celebrarunt, *ib.*—An. 1242. Ecclesia conventualis canonicorum de **WALTAM** solenniter valde ab episcopo Norwicensi, assistentibus aliis plurimis episcopis prælatis & magnatibus venerabilibus. *ibid.*—An. 1238. Ecclesia **SARISBURIENSIS** in crastino Sti. Michaelis ab Archiepiscopo Cantuariensi Bonifacio, præsentibus Rege & prælatorum copiosa multitudo. *ibid.*—An. 1251. Ecclesia de **HALES**; præsentibus dom. Rex & Regina & fere omnes Anglicæ magnates & prælati; episcopi vero tredecim, qui omnes missam die dedicationis celebrarunt, quilibet vero ad suum altare, *ibid.*—Anno quoque sub eodem nimis nobilis ecclesia cathedralis **ELYENSIS**, cujus presbyterium præterque hoc turrim excellentissimam opere admirabili ac sumptuoso nimis Hugo, ejusdem loci episcopus omnis honoris & honestatis amator magnificus propriis sumptibus usque ad perfectam consummationem construxerat.—officio intererant dedicationis ipse Elyens. episc. quod diu ante sitienter desideraverat; item Norwiciensis & Lond. Epp. affueruntque eidem solemnitati dominus Rex & multi Magnates regis, Prælati quoque & clerici innumerabiles, *ibid.*

* Εἰς αὐτὴν ἡ ἀφιέρωσις. *Euseb.*

† Among other Feasts to be observed and kept holy, this was one. Solennitas dedicationum ecclesiarum parochialium & sanctorum in quorum honorem ecclesiæ parochiales dedicantur. 36 *Edw. 3. 2n. 1362.* By an act of *Hen. VIII.* "The feast of dedicacyon of the Church shall in all places throughout this realm be celebrated & kept on the fyrst Sunday of the month of Octobre for ever, and upon none other day."

to lessen the veneration in which we hold the places that are set apart for divine worship. On the contrary, the allusion of the Text to the Temple of divine worship implies the necessity of keeping that holy; and the practice of consecration is warranted by the example of the Church in all ages from the time they first began to build them.

Still it will be said there is something of superstition and popish ceremony in the practice of consecrating Churches; as if the prayer to be presented in them would not be equally efficacious, and the worshipper alike acceptable to God if this form were omitted.

In the design of consecration there can be nothing superstitious. The design is such as cannot but approve itself to the sober judgment of every serious and unprejudiced mind. It is an humble dedication of the place to God's service. It is in itself an act of devout respect and reverence to the Being who is to be worshipped in it; and it is designed to lead us from a greater reverence of the place of God's worship to the greater reverence of God himself.

In the mode there may have been some things to offend. That may have been at times not altogether free from superstition, or it may have been loaded with ceremonies that were trifling or offensive. But it is not what the modes of other Churches may have been, or at this time may be; it is in the mode that our own Church hath adopted, and you this day have witnessed, that I ask what there is that is like superstition?

E

So

Is it a service of pomp, parade and mystery? Is it a form without any rational end in view to make it acceptable to God or useful to ourselves? Is it not an office at once solemn and expressive, decent in itself, well adapted to procure and preserve a becoming reverence to God and to the place that is called by his name, and calculated, as far as our humble prayers can effect, to draw down his blessing both upon the place and upon all the services that are to be celebrated in it?

Not to dwell upon the effect of our humble prayers to the sanctification of the place and the acceptance of the services to be performed in it, such is in itself the decency of setting apart "from all unhallowed, ordinary and profane uses*, " the place in which the great God of Heaven is to be approached and worshipped, so congenial with the feelings of piety, and so well calculated to impress the worshipper with a strong sense of the purity and holiness with which he should come into the presence of the divinity, that if there had been no countenance in scripture for what we do, no precedent in antiquity, none of the examples of former ages to direct us, we should have thought it decent and right to distinguish the place designed for such holy uses with peculiar reverence, to mark its designation with some appropriate service, and to implore as we this day do the divine blessing upon ourselves and services, that he will "have respect unto the prayer of his servants†" and "hearken unto the supplications which they shall make towards this place‡."

We

* Confirmation Service.

† 2 Chron. vi. 19.

‡ N. 21.

We cannot mark with too strong a line of distinction from all other places that in which the great King of Kings condescends to receive the addresses and to hold communion with his creatures. Though he is not visibly present, yet as the place in which he is spiritually to be met and worshipped there is something due to his presence, some reverence that the pious mind naturally feels himself inclined to pay, far remote from superstition ; and whatever tends to strengthen this veneration, and cherish in the mind of the worshipper a sense of the dispositions with which he should come before God, is surely not without its use.

With whatever familiarity those may come into the divine presence who feel no sense of the infinite distance between God and them, that exterior respect which the pious mind pays to the place which has been consecrated to his service is the dictate of genuine piety. There is something in these feelings of respect to the presence of the Deity which approves itself to our reason as highly decorous. To the name of God, the place of his worship, his word, his ordinances, every thing belonging to his service, the pious mind feels a respectful reverence. It is a feeling that we have from our earliest years. It has grown up with us ; and it has not like many of the superstitious notions of our childhood been dispersed by the light which we have derived from advancing years, but it has been strengthened as we became better acquainted with the Being to whom this veneration is paid. The more we know of him the more we feel ourselves bound to pay him the respect we do ; and the more we feel how inadequate the strongest marks of it that we can pay are to his infinite perfections.

It

It is too much the disposition of the age to consider every thing of this kind as superstition. Those external rites which the wisdom of God who knoweth our infirmities, or the piety of man conscious of his own, hath in past ages ordained as helps to devotion, are considered as the weak inventions of men, and remnants of that superstition which they discover in every ceremonial of religion.

Perhaps the time may come when Religion shall have no exterior left to be the object of their scorn ; when all but its morality shall be considered as priestcraft ; when public prayer shall be called hypocrisy ; when prayer of any kind shall be thought an exercise fit only for the unenlightened bigot, and the gloomy cell of the recluse ; when literally and strictly it shall be contended that the heart alone is the temple in which the divinity is to be worshipped, and the moral duties all that is worth preserving from the ruins of religion. When that time shall be (which God avert !) I need not predict of what sort their morality will be ; a morality “ formed after the rudiments of “ the world and not after Christ* : ” formed to suit the sentiments and manners of a licentious age, to be subservient to the views of worldly interest or ambition, and to interpose the fewest checks to the indulgence of their passions, every restraint of which they will consider as an abridgement of their liberties, and an infringement of their rights.

I forbear to anticipate even in imagination a prospect too sensibly realized in one part of the world, when they shall have none of the checks

* Coloss. ii. 8.

checks of religion to restrain them from the disorders and crimes into which their ungoverned passions would quickly lead them : for only so long as religion shall be respected and its ordinances observed can its effect upon the morals and happiness of society be expected. Soon will the absence of religious principle be felt in this or any country that shall think itself too wise to need or too independent to submit to its influence.

It is not we hope to any great extent that this is at present the case in our own country ; yet there are, amidst great and exemplary remains of pure and undefiled religion, some symptoms of declining piety, in the profanation of the Sabbath, in the neglect of public worship, in the contempt of religious institutions. Too many there already are, who, with all the conceit of the age in which we live, fancy these beggarly elements unsuited to their enlightened minds, and unnecessary in the present state of things. A sort of familiarity is creeping in, which forgets the respect which is due to their Creator, dropping all the exterior marks of veneration, every thing like a public acknowledgement of their dependance, even to the omission of that habit of thanksgiving without which the pious Christian would not in former times have sat down to his meals.

But whatever other improvements we may have to boast of, what is there that we see in the present state of mankind to render the aids of divine grace, or the helps that we derive from the wise and well intended ordinances of religion less necessary than at any former period ? This above all others is not the time to abandon any of the

outworks of religion. On the contrary, in proportion to their greater tendency to trample down all the institutions of antiquity should be the respect in which we hold them, and our care to preserve them; well knowing from what we see around us, that when its ordinances are despised, and its institutions trampled under foot, religion itself will not be long respected. Whatever might be the case with some few of strong spiritual feelings, who, like the early converts to Christianity, might be proof against all the discouragements of a despised or even persecuted religion, with respect to the mass of Christians they need all the aids which are to be derived from these subsidiary institutions, without which their devotion would languish and their spiritual affections would not be kept alive. It is not therefore wise, it is not prudent to lessen their respect for these; much less is it allowable, for the purpose of prejudicing their minds against established institutions, to charge us with corruptions and superstitions that do not belong to our church.

If in past ages the purity of divine worship has been corrupted by ceremonies offensive to the sober feelings of reason, let not that which has been done away still be considered as belonging to it; nor let the opprobrious terms of superstition, idolatry and popery be applied to a church which has long since reformed those errors and corruptions which might once have been deserving of them.

In so far as the services of the church of Rome were superstitious or loaded with ceremonies that were unmeaning or offensive they were reformed: that which "is good for the use of edifying" we retain,
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without the vain conceit of forming every thing anew, and retaining nothing that has been theirs. Whatever of superstition there was in this solemnity, whatever needless additions had been made to the few and significant ceremonies that were in use in the first dedication of Christian churches, these with other ceremonies which were not thought consistent with the simplicity of Christian worship were discontinued at the Reformation, and we at this day come as near as we can, in this as in all our liturgy, to the practice of the primitive church.

The fair and candid observer of the present solemnity, whatever his prejudices may have led him to expect, will own that there is nothing in the service that he hath this day heard which is not perfectly rational, and free from the least tincture of superstition.

Were it a service of unmeaning pomp and ceremony—Did we ascribe to it any charm that should operate to purify the place or sanctify the services to be performed in it—Did we by the act of consecration, free as it is from every thing of parade or mystery, suppose that the place is so hallowed that our services must necessarily be so too—Did we confine the salvation of souls to those who worship within these walls, or rest in the ground to be this day hallowed for the reception of those who sleep in Christ, there might be some ground for calling it a relick of popish superstition. But with all our predilection for the church whose members we are, attached to its constitution, and believing it to be both in doctrine and discipline
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formed after the purest models and to be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness *," for all the edifying purposes for which the church of Christ is constituted, we boast not of infallibility, nor pretend to claim any exclusive right to the keys of heaven.

Leaving to others who think less favourably of our Church the freest liberty to worship God in other places, we prepare for ourselves a Temple not adequate to the Being to whose service it is raised; "for what house will ye build me, saith the Lord †?" but such as creatures limited by confined capacities and powers can erect to the infinitely great and holy Being who created all things. The building which we erect is, with that reverence which we think due to so great a Being, consecrated to his service. It is held sacred as the house of God, never to be desecrated or defiled. But after all that human ingenuity can contrive or piety effect, it is at last but the temple made with hands. We ourselves must make our own services such as shall be suitable to the place and acceptable to the Being whom we worship in it. We must "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts ‡" as well as in the house that is called by his name.

What the defilements were which were expressly forbidden or generally understood to pollute the sanctuary of God, I need not enumerate. To those which are more applicable to our own times I shall confine the few observations that the time will allow me to make on this head.

From

* 1 Tim iii. 6.

† Acts vii. 49.

‡ 1 Pet iii. 5.

From you who have given proof of your piety to God in the erection of this expensive edifice, there is not, I am satisfied, any thing to be feared like sacrilege or profanation. I am not afraid that you who, while others have been employed in the pollution of Temples and defacing the altars of God, have been engaged in the pious work of erecting this building to the honour of his name, will follow that example and so defecrate or despoil it. I am not afraid that you will be "robbers of churches or blasphemers of your God*"--- that you will at any time "pollute this holy place," and make that "which should be called the house of prayer a den of thieves†." It is not to be feared while the present generation shall remain, and these walls shall stand a monument of your reverence to God and your zeal for his service, that you will rise in rebellion against him, or that you will set up an idol in his place "who shall oppose and exalt himself "above all that is called God or that is worshipped‡." You need not the page of history to inform you, or the word of God to denounce unto you that if any so defile the Temple of God "him shall God destroy." You have seen upon a large scale the dreadful consequences that follow the defilement of the Temple of God. In that country you have seen (God forbid that you should see it in your own!) that "He hath taken away his tabernacle as of a garden; he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the Lord hath caused the "solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Sion, and

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"hath.

* Acts xix. 37.

† Matt. xxi. 13.

‡ 2 Thess. ii. 4.

“ hath despised in the indignation of his anger the King and the Priest *.”

But though nothing like this we trust is to be feared in the Temple which has this day been consecrated to the service of God, it may be defiled by other means. It is not by sacrilege alone, by profanation or indecencies of a grosser nature that it may be done. The impure worshipper, he whose heart is not right with God, whose own soul is polluted with sin, who still liveth in the sins which he comes here to confess and contradicts in his life the professions which he calls upon God to witness, he defileth this holy Temple.

Into this sacred place should enter nothing that is unholy or impure. “ The Temple of God is Holy.” Ye must be holy too. When you come within these walls it must be remembered that you are in the more immediate presence of the Deity. Impressed with a sense of his presence whom no people have at any time presumed to approach without those external rites that have marked the purity and holiness that are due to his presence ; whom if he were visibly present, the object of our sight as he is now the object of our faith, no eye could behold but with the profoundest veneration and awe, and of whom the best praises that such imperfect creatures can present are very unworthy, you will “ come before him with clean thoughts and pure hearts, with bodies undefiled, and minds sanctified †.” You will “ lift up holy hands ‡” and offer the incense

* Lam. ii. 6.

† Consecration office.

‡ 1 Tim. ii. 8.

cense of a pure heart. You will "worship him in spirit and in truth," with that true and spiritual worship without which neither the Temple nor the service can at any time find acceptance in his sight.

It is not enough, you well know, to build churches unto God, or to be members of any communion however reformed or pure. It is not the erection of this building, however laudable the design—it is not the most solemn consecration of it—it is not even your most regular attendance upon the ordinances that will be celebrated in it, that will alone sanctify your devotions here, or at any time release you from the discharge of other duties. The offering must be pure as well as the place; yourselves as well as the service; the Temple of your bodies as well as the Temple in which your services are presented.

In vain has the pious care of our ancestors left us the venerable buildings which remain to adorn our land—In vain do we rebuild the mouldering columns of antiquity—In vain have we been at so much cost of expence and time to erect a building more commodious to receive the numerous worshippers that a populous and growing neighbourhood required, if we neglect the ends for which such buildings are intended, or in the services to be here performed it is that the whole of our religion is to be found.

If we conceive that the costliness of the structure will be sufficient to dispense with the service, or if we be disposed to substitute
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form for substance, or to rest upon forms alone however excellent they be, our religion is again a ceremonial one ; we do that which the Jews before us did with their Temple and services, and we must be prepared to expect that the consequences will sooner or later be the same. You have a proof at hand that the Temple and the forms of worship may remain, the most expensive structures, and all the exteriors of devotion in the highest pomp and splendor, when the soul of religion is departed. You have their example to warn you that from formal devotees, from constant attendants upon the exteriors of devotion even to superstition, the distance is not great to downright infidelity and a mockery of all religion.

To a congregation actuated by the desire which has led to the erection of this building, I need not express a hope that they will neither profane it to unholy uses, nor discredit the laudable zeal they have shewn to raise it by a cold, a formal, or a rare attendance in it.

The earnest desire to prepare for themselves and the many others that were precluded from the means of worshipping the God of their fathers, a Temple suited to the honour of his name, relieves me from the task of pressing upon you the duty of a faithful attendance upon the ordinances of our Church and an exemplary deportment in it. Thankful for the opportunity that is now provided, the serious Christian will want no persuasion to induce him to employ it to his own comfort and edification ; and he will rejoice that

a place is now prepared capacious to receive all who are alike desirous to frequent it.

No longer shall the conscientious worshipper complain that he cannot find a place to pay his devotions to God, and to hear the things in which his soul delighteth. No longer shall he go away disappointed from the place to which his education, his habits, his convictions lead him. No longer even shall the pretext be afforded to those whom the slightest excuses are sufficient to keep away when the attachment is weak and the will is wanting: the removal of a cause of which there was but too much occasion to complain will prove to each how far that cause applied to himself.

For the poor, equally interested and equally entitled to a share in their heavenly Father's house, large and comfortable provision has been made; that they will be now without excuse to silence their own conscience, to stop the mouth of their minister, or to defeat the benevolent counsels of their superiors, whose friendly assistance, never in vain solicited for the relief of their temporal necessities, will not, I trust, be wanting to complete a more important good intended for them in their spiritual.

To all of whatever description it is a subject of great joy that the House of God is now ready for your reception; and if in that joy I feel my share, it is because it has fallen to my lot to know how much you needed this accommodation—it is because, in a long connection with you, I have felt with painful solicitude your in-

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convenience and my own; yours, who were ill provided or not at all accommodated in the former church; and my own, who, with whatever desire to discharge the important relation subsisting between us, wanted the opportunity to do it—it is because I anticipate for those who shall succeed me in the situation in which I stand, a pleasure above every other gratifying to those “who minister about holy things,” the pleasure of seeing this great congregation united in pouring out their hearts before God in his Holy place, hearing the divine word, and strengthening one another by their mutual example and prayers: for I trust in that God who hath put it into your hearts to build this house unto his name, that the day which you have so long desired to see will be marked with the consecration of yourselves as well as this Temple to his service—that you will not, by neglect or inattention on your own part, lose the benefits which those who have been active in this undertaking considered themselves as instruments in the hand of God to procure for you; but that you will fulfil their joy, and make it indeed a subject of joy unto yourselves, by a faithful and conscientious use of the opportunities it will afford you to pay your devotions to God, and attend to the care of your souls.